

# Parents FLAG Edmonton

Newsletter

February 1994

Next meeting will be: February 15, 1994 @ 7:30 p.m.

For more information phone Lynne at [REDACTED]

Happy Valentines Day!

## Dues

Just a reminder that 1994 dues are being collected until the end of February. Due to the expense of mailing newsletters we regret that anyone not paying dues will be dropped from the mailing list.

## Convention

Parents Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays 13th annual will be held from September 2-5th 1994 in San Francisco. Anyone wishing to know more details may contact Joan at [REDACTED]

## A Valentines Story

(Taken from Vancouver P-FLAG newsletter)

Two male flamingos at the Rotterdam Zoo, having bound themselves in a loving relationship, have bred a flamingo chick. The two had repeatedly sought to steal eggs from female flamingos in order to hatch them as their own. Feeling sorry for the birds, the zoo-keepers provided them with a fertilized egg. The proud "parents" have remained faithfully at the side of their young ever since.

## Pins

If you still wish to purchase a P-FLAG pin you may do so from Cindy at our next meeting.

## A Regular Column

Stan, from the Vancouver P-FLAG writes a column on street safety. Stan has kindly passed the column on to us and it will now become a regular feature of our newsletter. This program applies to everyone regardless of sex or sexual orientation.

## Street Smarts

The street safety programme is a set of guidelines which can greatly increase one's safety while walking city streets, especially at night. It has two purposes, to make you aware of when an incident of gay bashing might be about to happen, and how to avoid and escape such a situation.

The intention is not to alter anyone's lifestyle. It is just that there are ways to make life safer. there are positive and effective things you can do to avoid being attacked, and ways to deal with potential attackers that reduce your chances of being injured.

Be STREET SMART! Walk confidently. Walk defensively. Avoid poorly lit streets. Know where shelter is. Find safety in numbers. Don't drink and crawl. Be prepared to let your natural instinct for survival work for you, and trust your instincts. Ignore verbal harassment. Take flight, don't stay and fight. Make a lot of noise if attacked. If faced with a group of attackers, RUN! Tell the police.



## TEN SIMPLE THINGS YOU CAN DO TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

1. Become a member of P-FLAG and join with thousands of people from all walks of life, working to end discrimination against lesbians and gays.

2. Teach your children that being gay or lesbian is simply another means of expressing love.

3. If one of your family is gay or lesbian be sure to let them know you love them just the way they are.

4. Don't tell anti-gay jokes. You just perpetuate the stereotypes about gays and lesbians.

5. Read our P-FLAG literature and find out more about what it is really like to be a lesbian or gay in our society.

6. Be open with others about having lesbian or gay friends or family. SECRECY BREEDS SHAME.

7. If you overhear someone making an anti-gay comment, let them know you don't agree or approve.

8. Write government to protest any anti-gay legislation as you become aware of it.

9. Encourage open and honest discussion of gay and lesbian issues in your home, workplace and church.

10. Stand with those who believe that discrimination is a crime against humanity - TAKE A STAND WITH P-FLAG.



# Taking pride in our gay son

BY HARRY MEANWELL

**A**S the father of a gay son (and "father-in-law" of his partner), I will be marching in the gay and lesbian Pride Day parade on Sunday — my first one. I will be celebrating my son as he is, and celebrating the contribution that he, his partner and his friends make by showing us how to live with dignity and exhibit true compassion in a hostile community.

It was more than 20 years ago that John came out to us. He was married and had to cope with separation as well as coming to terms with all the feelings of self-loathing and disgust that society had taught him to feel. Some enlightened counselling and tremendous support from his wife and in-laws got him through his suicidal moments. He paid us the compliment of confiding in us, and despite his own soul-searching, helped us to begin our journey of understanding.

My wife and I both come from very tolerant families, but our initial acceptance was pretty superficial. However, it was obvious that, in his case, homosexuality was not a choice, and as we met his friends and learned more about homosexuality, the myths and stereotypes dissolved.

Statistics proved that homosexuals were less likely to molest children than heterosexuals. Serious relationships are terribly important for them, and we marvelled at the stability achieved with no religious or societal support. Casual, anonymous sex is probably more prevalent among gays than among straights, for understandable reasons: Their hunger for personal acceptance in the face of abuse, discrimination and rejection — even by families — fuels this. We came to understand and admire the courage and stamina required to live secret lives and the energy expended just to maintain this front. No wonder they feel more comfortable — and safer — in gay bars.

As a life-long committed Anglican, former warden and Bible-class teacher, I had to come to terms with the biblical references to homosexuality and found a great deal of responsible liberation theology that cast doubt on fundamentalist interpretations. After 20 years of study — and more important, observation — we are satisfied that homosexual orientation is a natural occurrence in a small percentage of society — the exact causes and percentages don't matter. It is also highly resistant to change through prayer or counselling — surely we remember what we tried to do to left-handers to "cure" them.

And yes, we wondered about their "behaviour" in bed — although why this small part of their total personality preoccupies the public is a great mystery to

us. The past 20 years have seen all kinds of books on how to enjoy sex — for straights and gays. We don't know why anyone needs a book, but surely lots of straight people find some of the straight techniques inappropriate. So why condemn real or imagined gay sex? We now feel strongly that there is no form of sexual expression that is inappropriate between consenting couples — gay or straight — who care deeply about and respect each other.

And let's stop doing what drives our lesbian and gay friends crazy — analyzing them to death, like rare bugs. Let's look at the human consequences of societal and ecclesiastical stigmatization.

**P**EOPLE are well aware of issues such as gays in the military, gay spousal rights and benefits and anti-discrimination legislation because of extensive media coverage. What is less well known, and even more serious because laws don't help, is the systemic, inherited prejudice that breaks up families when a son or daughter discovers, and reveals, that he or she is "different." In the case of persecution because of colour, ethnicity or religion, families close ranks for mutual comfort and support. Homophobia and even heterosexism (the assumption that the world is straight) threaten family stability by conditioning too many parents to reject their gay and lesbian children.

So what does a gay or lesbian teenager do — tell or not tell the parents? Either way it's a tough decision and adds to the trauma of discovering, resolving and accepting a different orientation. No wonder a disproportionately high percentage of male suicides are gay. AIDS, of course, can provide the final compounded horror, if the parents learn for the first time that their dead son was gay and shared his secret life with a steady partner.

We have been involved for some years with an organization called Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, a support group that tries to help young people determine if, when and how to "come out" to their families, and how to help parents and families respond. There's an awful lot of healing required as a result of our inherited beliefs, and support-group therapy can keep families together more effectively than much of the political rhetoric about family values.

Our son did not choose to be gay — who on Earth would choose to be part of a minority group despised by church and state? But neither he, nor we, would want him any different. As parents, we

still have little understanding of what our gay children go through — the internal turmoil, the constant fear of unwanted disclosure, the fear for job, housing and personal safety. We shouldn't want our children and grandchildren growing up in this kind of world.

This is why education — not just as a special subject, but woven into any consideration of sexuality — is so important. Certainly it requires a whole new way of thinking.

Let's ensure that, at home and school, as a regular part of our normal conversations, children are helped to realize that homosexuality can be a perfectly natural discovery — not a choice — for some.

Let's ensure that parents are helped to realize that you can't "recruit" homosexuals through responsible education or matter-of-fact discussion. Further, that some day, if they have earned the right to be trusted, they might have to respond to a child who says, "Mom — can you handle this — I'm different."

That's my testament to a son and his partner who have taught us to understand, accept, and go on to celebrate who they are.

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*Harry Meanwell is a retired executive living in Toronto.*

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